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Senator Lawrence, Representative Berry, and distinguished members of the Energy, Utility, and Technology Committee, thank you for allowing me to comment in support of LD 1708: An Act to Create the Pine Tree Power Company. My name is Gary Ridlon and I've lived in Maine all my life. I strongly support this legislation because as a 86-year-old lobsterman, I care about preserving the way of life for fishermen like me and the fishermen who will come after me, and a COU is one of the simplest and most effective ways to do that.

I've been lobstering down in Cape Porpoise for over 70 years. My father, grandfather, and great-grandfather were lobstermen too. But things are changing, and we need to act now before we lose our lobstering industry in Maine. The Maine Climate Council says that the Gulf of Maine is already warming faster than 99% of the world's oceans.[1] They say Maine's lobster and clam fisheries are shrinking because of it.[2] I'm no scientist, but I know these waters and I'm already seeing the impact.

We need to take action fast to protect our industry, our fishing communities, and ourselves. Investor-owned utilities like CMP don't care about climate change. They don't care about us lobstermen. They don't care about the oceans. They care about profit, and they fight against our interests to make more money.

CMP also doesn't care about the Mainers who depend on them for power. My late wife was battling breast cancer and was in hospice care and hooked up to an oxygen machine when the power went out for days. I had to find an oxygen tank to replace her machine. The power remained out for a couple days, without the help of a nurse and my daughters who went looking for an oxygen tank, my wife would have died during that outage.

I've been around a long time and I know that Mainers take care of each other. We know each other and we can depend on each other. CMP is only interested in profit, but I trust a COU to help protect Maine against climate change and power outages, not just because that will be the law, but also because that's what Mainers do—support each other and the community. A COU run by a publicly elected board will be more accountable to consumers and take our interests seriously, because the COU and consumer interests will be the same.

I support a COU to replace CMP and Versant because it will be more accountable, better for Mainers, better for the environment, and better for our Maine way of life.

Thank you for your time.